

The Mystery of the Kailash Trail



Chapter 8 **Kingdom of the Lion**

Bharat Bhushan

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Pre-publication draft manuscript

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About the book

The oldest mystery known to the Oriental World. It is said that nobody dares to venture out to walk on the Kailash Mountain. And it is also said that those who walked up the mountain, never returned. In all these centuries, they have gone within, never to return.

About the author

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**Book 2: Chapter 8: Part 1: The Beyul team
proceeds inside the mysterious valley.**

Brother Tameng and Sangye made good progress inside the maze of rock boulders in proceeding ahead on the faint path that they could see. A large wild yak could have easily walked through this maze, on this path, thought Brother Tameng. If they would have walked in single file, they would have moved through and arrived at the valley of the sacred *Kang Renpoche* Mountain. Yeshe and Satawa were following them with the yaks and horses. The animals seemed to be moving through comfortably, and did not show any distress or fear. The yak boys and horse boys were spread among the animals, alternating with them.

The monk from Dirapuk had stayed behind, outside the maze of boulders, at the night shelter that had been placed near the entrance. He had asked Norbu and two boys with their animals to stay with him. Norbu's two yaks and his mastiff were walking about in the clearing with the two other yaks and horse from the Choku gumpa. They examined the equipment with the group and began to separate the stuff to be retained at the shelter. The yak-boy and the horse-boy went about collecting the timber lying around to strengthen the shelter. It must have been many years since anyone had come to this clearing. Several good poles and bamboo was easily available.

Inside the maze of boulders, Dawa and Katishe followed Brother Tameng and Sangye. The four of them were walking ahead of the group of animals and boys led by

Satawa. The maze continued for a long distance, and very soon, Brother Tameng lost all sense of time, and of day or night. Sangye kept following him, without looking around at the boulders. He sensed the magic of the place, and could feel the power emanating from all around. Dawa kept Sangye in his sight, and walked at the same pace, and allowed for Katishe and Satawa to keep control and walk the animals at a steady speed behind them.

Brother Tameng stopped on the trail. The passage ahead was dark and the boulders had fallen in a manner that light did not enter the trail. He looked around for a possible trail through other sides. There did not seem to be any other passage. The path had to go through the dark passage within the maze of boulders. They seemed to be in some sort of a clearing within the boulders, and there was better light and visibility at the spot where he stood. Sangye, Dawa and Katishe walked around in the small clearing, trying their best to spot any hidden opening in the trail. Norbu and the other boys and all the animals came up and stood, waiting patiently in the clearing.

Sangye walked up to the dark passage and peered inside with his clump of lit-up grass. He could see the boulders on both sides, and the trail going ahead. Sangye, Dawa and Katishe got busy preparing a series of grass clumps for lighting up in the trail. Brother Tameng sat in the clearing, worried, thinking and trying to sort out this new development. Norbu's mastiff came up to him and sat quietly near him, watching him with patient eyes. Satawa and the boys kept a watch on the animals, and kept talking to them, to ensure that they stayed calm and peaceful.

Brother Tameng came to a decision. He called out to Sangye, Dawa, Katishe and Satawa to approach him, and said, “Brothers, I feel I should stop here. I am not aware of what is beyond this dark passage in this maze of boulders. I came back with the monk from Dirapuk, expecting us to go ahead easily through the valley, and to search for the herd of the large wild yaks. But, that was not to be. There was the blockage, with the large boulders, stopping us in our path yesterday. And what we saw today, of the signals and happenings, the messages and signs that we received, that allowed us to enter, makes me cautious.”

“I feel that I should return to Dirapuk and Choku. I will have to once again inform my senior, Master Rinchen. This was not expected to happen. We will need to be cautious. Let that not stop you all. You go ahead, and when you feel that you cannot proceed, then, you should stop and stay. Send someone back to Dirapuk,” said Brother Tameng, “We will not leave you all alone. We will set up a good base camp at the night shelter that you had constructed. Someone will have to stay guard at the place, and will have to prevent curious people from entering. Tourists may hear the gossip and may begin to walk inside the maze of boulders. You go ahead. I will return my horse and one horse-boy.”

Old man Dawa nodded in agreement. He could understand the dilemma. For the people of the Lhachu valley, this was their life. They accepted the mountains, the valleys, the trails and the unknown without question and proceeded along a path, when available. For those who were educated, there had to be a reason, a logic, an understanding, of how, why, where and when. The facts

that were not known, the knowledge that was not available, was to be feared. Dawa smiled, for the people of the valley, those who were not educated, and this was true of most of them, the mountains were their teachers, their knowledge-givers and he was keen to learn.

Brother Tameng returned along the path that they had come through, within the maze of boulders, with one horse and one horse-boy. Sangye, Katishe, Dawa and Satawa discussed the situation amongst themselves. Yeshe sat nearby and listened quietly. The two yak boys and one horse boy with them, sat near the animals. The discussion ended quite rapidly, and it was decided that old man Sangye and Katishe would lead the group through the dark passage. Dawa would follow them, with Yeshe and Satawa keeping the animals and the boys between them.

Sangye peered cautiously inside the dark passage. The boulders seemed to be in place, on either side. The trail was clearly seen in the light of the flames from the grass clump that he was holding. He began to walk inside the passage. Katishe walked behind him, watching his silhouette appear and disappear, each time that Sangye moved the grass clump ahead of him and behind him. Dawa walked behind them, with the help of the faint glow, and with the light from the flames of the grass clump held by Yeshe behind him.

The passage inside the boulders did not seem to have changed in any manner, except that it had become extremely dark. They kept walking, watching the boulders alongside, alert for any turn or passage that would have been missed in the darkness. The trail kept stretching ahead smoothly, and the group walked

comfortably. The animals did not panic and did not hesitate. Sangye's two mastiffs, Bzanba and Kangryi, walked ahead of Yeshe, sometimes silently, and sometimes making noises, that sounded like they were happy to be part of the group inside this dark passage.

The trail ahead of Sangye turned sharply, and began to climb inside the valley. Faint light could be seen ahead, and he walked faster towards it. There were brightly lit openings ahead, inside the passage. The slope seemed to indicate that they were climbing steadily. And then, suddenly, they were out of the passage, and into a open clearing, higher up than the carpet of boulders that they could see, stretching out inside the boxed-in valley. They could not see beyond a certain distance, probably from where the passage had turned sharply. The boulders had filled up the valley. Sangye kept looking around, trying to figure out the source of all these huge boulders. It looked like an entire mountain had crashed here.

The group assembled in the open clearing, and sat around, resting quietly, and watching the valley ahead. There seemed to be an awkward problem, thought old man Dawa. There did not seem to be any valley ahead. The trail seemed to climb through the narrow gorge, and disappeared above. They would have to walk ahead, and watch out for what was in store for them further beyond the trail and the gorge.

Sangye looked around, as had Dawa, walking about in the clearing. The opening to the passage was easily seen from here, unlike the other side, where they had failed to spot it early. Turning to the group, he said, "Brothers, let us create a shelter here, and write down a message for those who may follow us. There are plenty of small

boulders lying around here, and we can manage to construct a small hut, with a wooden roof, to the best of our ability. We may also need it ourselves, if there would be problems ahead. So, let us construct a large hut to extend out of a cave-sort of opening that can be made from the entrance to this passage. If light could not enter it, I am sure, rain or snow or hail cannot enter it.”

Yeshe and the three boys, Katishe and Satawa, got busy with the construction of the stone hut. Sangye and Dawa looked ahead at the manner in which the trail seemed to disappear into the very narrow horizon between the two sheer walls of the gorge.



Book 2: Chapter 8: Part 2: Have they entered the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’?

Among the four of them, Dawa, Sangye, Katishe and Satawa, they were the best of the four trailsmen of the Lhachu Valley. Nobody knew the hills, the valleys, the rivers and glaciers of the *Kang Renpoche* area better than these old men. Yeshe looked proudly at this grandfather, and knew that Sangye was much better than the other three, for he came from outside the valley and traveled through the year in the other areas, including far off Qinhai and other provinces of Tibet. He had also accompanied his grandfather and parents to Karakul Lake for three years to try and earn a living during the tourist season at Kashgar and Kongur, but that had not worked out.

The stone hut had been constructed. It was set up against an opening amongst the rocks near the passage within the boulders. They had decided to avoid blocking the passage, for fear that the herd of large wild yaks or other wildlife may want to move through, going into the valley, or going outside. The hut was constructed with the boulders from the landslide, and had been camouflaged with adequate branches and timber. It was quite large, and they could move the animals and themselves deep within the hut, and set up a good warm fire.

There were two yak boys and one horse boy, and they had begun to develop a good friendship and chatter with Yeshe. They were still worried and scared about Sangye’s huge mastiffs, Bzanba and Kangryi, but they had realized that as long as Yeshe would be around, the dogs would not turn harmful. The hut had been

constructed with two cosy rooms within it, with an opening between them. The small rooms would retain the warmth from the fire and would allow them to retreat in the cold nights that they would encounter.

Dawa and Sangye looked out at the trail, sitting at the opening of the stone hut. Dawa said, “Old man from Qinhai, I do not think this will be the last hut that we are going to construct in this valley. Who knows how many days or weeks or months we may have to be here? I am not frightened of the winter. I will stay back here, if we do not get any answers. You can return to your warm plains of Tibe, outside these sacred valleys, and ride about on your horses, and pretend to be nomads. I am going to end my life here, in this Beyul. I know it.”

Katishe and Satawa, sitting nearby, smiled at Dawa’s statement. They knew him from many years in the valley. Sangye, noting the jibe about his life as a nomad, merely nodded, in the laconic face-shrug that is famously representative of the Orient and replied, “I fear about what we are going to walk into after that narrow pass that is above us. This trail seems to climb sharply. We are now sharply traveling northwest of the *Kang Renpoche* areas. These areas are known to be extremely mysterious areas. People have come here, over centuries, in the other valleys. Nobody seems to have entered this valley.”

Dawa agreed, and said, “I know what you are talking about. I may have been in one or two expeditions, nearly twenty or thirty years ago, when these outsiders did not have good equipment and could not survive in these areas for many months. Let us go inside, for it is getting colder and the cold air is beginning to bite my nose. I

need it to help me breathe and blow the smoke out from my cigarettes. Let us take rest for the night, and pretend we are all at Darchen or Choku or at Dirapuk, with Yeshe's parents. I hope the boys have cooked some good soup and dinner."

It must have been about four in the evening, but the night had taken over. The cold mist came over suddenly around the hut and blocked out their vision of the valley. This was not wise, thought Katishe. With the help of the boys, the two trailsmen and Yeshe, rapidly piled up large stones at the entrance to the hut, and closed it completely. It would not do for leopards or bear or perhaps, wolves or wild yaks to wander inside in the mist. The group would not be able to escape and would be cornered and trapped. The hut had been constructed without windows, but there were some gaps for inflow of air, and at the rear, almost close to the valley walls of the mountains, an opening had been allowed inside a clump of adjoining trees, to allow the smoke from the fire to go outside, without being seen, unless someone was searching for them. The group sat together inside one of the small rooms and started with the hot soup. The animals were all grouped together in the other small room. The boys had thoughtfully kept a small fire going, in their room.

Dawa asked of Sangye, "Old nomad from Qinhai, you have traveled in these regions, from the northern ranges, and to the north of the *Kang Renpoche*. What do you think happened here, and where do you think we are going? We are northwest of Dirapuk, but we seem to be going up north, straight, and sometimes to the west. Tomorrow, we will know, when we observe the stars at early dawn, if we are lucky, and the mist would have

gone by then. These may be hidden valleys, and may be quite large, but there would be something, someplace, some hill-range on the other side of this mysterious place.”

“True, very true,” replied Sangye, “at this moment, it does seem like we have been walking north from Dirapuk. But, I do not like the sight of that narrow mountain pass that seems to climb upwards. People from places away from the Himalayas do not realize this aspect. They look at a map, and they only seem East, West, North and South. What they do not realize is that our world is also made up of UP and DOWN. We may not go North or South, but going UP or DOWN can be made of several miles.”

“There is another aspect that worries me,” continued Sangye, “we may be entering the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’, that is yet another mysterious place. It seems to be part of the mythology of this ancient land of Tibe, but the story did occur north and northwest of Dirapuk and the sacred *Kang Renpoche* Mountain. Nobody knows much about the place. But, it could be nearby. Or, we may be inside the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’ already. This much is known. The ‘Kingdom of the Lion’ is certainly somewhere in the Nganglong Kangri or near the Gangdise Shan mountains. We are between these mountains and the *Kang Renpoche* Mountains. So, we are nearby.”

Dawa nodded in agreement, for he knew of these mountain ranges. He explained to Kitashé, Satawa and Yeshe, “This is an old old story. The story of the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’. We do not know much about it. But this much, I know. There is another story of an

enormous hidden water storage area, below, inside the mountains somewhere here. It could be an underground waterbody, like a glacier is formed above the ground. There used to be Hindu sages, living in the caves near an area that was known by the Lion. There were Bon and Buddhist monks, who would go up these mountains and meditate inside the caves.”

Katishe spoke up, “Old man Dawa, you forget one other story from these places. The gateway to hell. There is also talk and stories about the lake that is totally black in colour, unlike the lakes below our sacred *Kang Renpoche* Mountain. It is said, that if you enter this lake, you can travel to hell, and meet all sorts of demons and evil spirits. Is that true? Are we entering forbidden lands?”

Dawa and Sangye sat quietly, and showed by furrowed brows on their faces, that they were thinking deeply. It would not do to answer such questions in a light-hearted manner. The evil spirits and demons may be moving around, and they could be inside the stone hut. They may be waiting for such a mistake, and may get angry and take up residence inside any one of them, or inside the animals. Dawa said, “I agree, Katishe, for, I have also heard talk of this Black Lake. But we do not have to worry. For, the problem comes if we enter the lake waters. Not before.”

“We are here, in trail paradise, for trapping and fur collections. There is amazing wildlife in these regions. Bear, Chiru, Mountain Goats, Leopards and different types of monkeys and gibbons. There is good market for these skins. But the government prohibits us to carry weapons and arms and we are prevented by the sacred

region from hunting the wildlife in these places. Do you know that we get different types of leopard in this region? The yellow one with spots, the white one on the snow and the third one, smaller, but with grey-white design. I hope we do not spot any leopard. They are always faster and more alert than you.”

“There used to be a time, when one could see Chiru and mountain goats and wild yaks in herds of hundreds moving about on the upper slopes of most of these mountains. Today, they are not to be seen even in small groups or herds. I am glad that we are chasing a herd of large wild yaks in these mountains, and not a flock of high flying birds, or fishes or leopards. I hope tomorrow is a fine day, and there is bright sunshine, and we are able to see wild animals and birds in the valley.”



Book 2: Chapter 8: Part 3: The tracks of a lone wild yak in the mysterious valley.

The old man Dawa sat quietly through the night. He could feel the excitement, the tingling of expectation that he usually had, when the night led to the hunt in the morning. The nights in these upper Himalayas were unusually longish, seeing that they began at almost 4 pm in the evening and went on until 10 or 11 am in the upper hills. The *Kang Renpoche* areas and the Manasarovar Lake areas were more open and the dawn was at these areas much earlier.

The stone hut had been built quite strongly. The smaller rooms had been set up quite deep into the opening amongst the rocks and there were two longish passage-like rooms that turned into one another at sharp angles before the stone doorway. They would have to do something about that doorway, he thought. It would not do to keep piling up stones and boulders. The day was also dangerous if wandering leopards or bears would walk in. There was word of vagrant tigers, very rarely reported, but who could tell with these remote valleys. It almost seemed like the herd of the large wild yaks would be the least dangerous.

Dawa thought back of all the hunts that he had been on and the ages of tracking that he had done. He had been quite busy as a trapper in his young days, learning from his grandfather and father before him, and from the other elders in the region. Those had been really good days, he thought, remembering the feel of the fur, the sharpness of the hunt and the understanding of the small tricks that the animals would go into, while hiding themselves in these high mountains. It was different, each season, he

remembered, and they would have to change their methods every time. The traps had been different for each season, and the location that they would choose for the same species would be different.

Perhaps all that knowledge would be useful tomorrow, he thought. He kept walking up and down the passages inside the stone hut. The last room had been given to their animals, and they had seemed to welcome the warmth and the glow of the fire. The mastiffs had made their own corner, and yet, they could keep a watch on Yeshe. They must be feeling very protective of their human owner. Dawa smiled and wondered if Yeshe knew that the mastiffs felt that they protected him, rather than the other way around.

The entire team had organised themselves around the fire in the room before the one for the animals. There were actually three small fires, with one kept aside in the northern corner, and this had been placed for allowing Sangye to conduct his prayers. The second fire was deeper in the ground, and there were many small boulders arranged inside. This fire was for cooking, and the warmth inside the arrangement of the boulders would stay within. The third fire was much larger, but spread out, to allow for the embers to remain warm.

Dawa kept feeling his right palm tingle and itch. He knew the feeling. It came the night before the hunt, and he wondered about it. What would it be out there, in the valleys? It seemed to be something quite special. He reorganised his supplies and equipment slowly through the night. He wanted to be ready for any eventuality. He removed some of his supplies and clothes and warm blankets from the packages that were to go on the yaks.

The bag would have to be just heavy enough for him to carry it by himself.

He was ready for tomorrow. He had his bag, his woollens, food supplies, medicines and stock of candles and matches. Everyone continued sleeping. The excitement of the day and the struggle to construct the stone hut in rapid time had been tiring. They knew that they were secure inside the hut, and this had allowed for veterans like Sangye, Katishe and Satawa to lower their guard and sleep properly. They would not have done so, if they would have feared any wandering predator.

Dawa smiled at his thoughts of the day. The two priests had returned. This is what he delighted in, for being able to organise his own thoughts and take decisions for himself. If Brother Tameng or the monk from the Dirapuk monastery would have been with them, Dawa would have had to listen and obey their instructions. He had grown up with the knowledge that in this strange region of the *Kang Renpoche*, one should not question the mysterious manner of events.

He must have dozed off, he thought, waking up with a start. His right palm was itching very badly and he kept scratching it silently. The three fires in the room were glowing brightly. Old man Dawa kept watching the flames. They seemed to be talking to each other. A gust of cold air came down from one of the openings high up, and it sparked the large fire. The flames rose up in response, and Dawa looked at them, startled. He could see the image of the herd of the large wild yaks that had walked down the valley during the rainstorm. The image seemed to form within the flames, and the yaks were watching him, quietly.

Dawa looked around to see if anyone else was awake. None. They were all asleep. The flames had gone down again, and the image of the yaks was gone. It seemed like it was a message just meant for Dawa, he thought to himself. Well, yaks or no yaks, spirits or no spirits, at this age, when life had moved by him, over all these years, he was not going to go and get defeated by phantom yaks or for that matter, a herd of large wild yaks, if they indeed existed. He got up and went up to the doorway and picked out a stone to look outside.

The sight outside startled him. It seemed bright out there, with very clear moonlight washing up the entire valley. He could see the valley slopes and the forests and the rocky walls extremely clearly. Old man Dawa went back inside the stone hut and woke up Sangye, and whispered to him, “Old nomad from Qinhai, listen quietly, and go back to sleep. I am going outside by myself, for its bright out there, with the moonlight. I will not go far, but do not stop me. I am taking my supplies and woollens with me. Relax and stay with the others.”

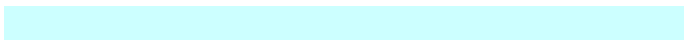
Dawa removed some of the stones near the opening and slid through sideways. Once outside, he walked around for some moments, getting the feel of the night. It did not seem to be extremely cold, and he knew he could survive this chill, quite easily. There was no wind, and the valley was totally drenched in white moonlight. He could see everywhere clearly. He went back to the stone wall doorway, and reaching inside, pulled out his haversack and supplies. He had also got a stout walking stick for himself, and to this stick, he tied a prayer flag. Turning back, he piled up the stones to close the opening in the doorway that he had made for himself.

Which way to go? Dawa thought, looking at the steep rock walls. There was actually no other way out, other than the sharp trail that led upwards to the opening outwards from the valley that they had noticed in the evening. What if, he thought, what if, what if he did not take the obvious way out of the valley? The others would definitely go through the opening and would take that trail. Was there another trail within this valley? Was there more to this boxed in area inside these mountains? He looked around, with this perspective, trying to imagine out trails that could stay hidden within the sharp walls and forest cover.

That one there, he thought. That had to be it. The western corner of the boxed in area, was covered with forests. He could not see inside the forests. If there was an opening that led out to another part of the valley, to another trail, those forests could easily hide such a path. The forests climbed up to quite a height at that corner. The walls of the mountain could also not actually make a corner, at that spot, he thought. There may be a path out there. He began to walk towards the forest area and looked down at the trail, startled.

The trail seemed quite easy to walk on, and was quite smooth. And yet, it could not be made out in contrast to the valley floor. But, in this moonlight, without searching for the trail, and just by keeping the western corner as a target, old man Dawa found that he could walk easily without any hassles. He had reached the forest line, and he looked back to the stone hut and the passage through the boulders that they had traveled out from. It was a straight line, downwards. This was indeed a natural trail. Looking downwards, with the moonlight

striking down on the shiny stones on the valley floor, Dawa recognised the pattern on the dusty path, startled. It was definitely a trail, and it was indeed a wild yak trail. There it was, faint, but certainly to be seen. A clear footprint, a lone wild yak, an extremely large one. Alone. It had gone into the forest. Very recent.



Book 2: Chapter 8: Part 4: The gateway to the 'Kingdom of the Lion'.

Sangye could not sleep after Dawa had woken him and told him that he was going out there all alone. He knew the feeling. Old man Dawa must have itched to go out there, into the valley, knowing that it was out there, calling him, to explore and walk through it. He had watched Dawa take his bag and realised that he must have sat through the night, packing and getting ready. Sangye, the old nomad from Qinhai, got up and stoked the flames in the small room for the animals, and got it to become warmer.

He heard Dawa place the stones back on the doorway. He would have to wait until the morning, to allow for the animals to be packed up and ready for walking. He had a wristwatch, given to him by some Russian trekkers, years ago, and it ran accurately. Sometimes, he got new batteries for it at Shiquanhe, and it would run for more than a year without any problem. It was a trekker's watch for high altitudes, and cold winters. It had a glow to it during the night, and it had been many a night that he had sought comfort and sanity during winters by just gazing at the glowing dial inside his sleeping bag. It could get quite frightening during the winter nights.

Around 7 am, he woke up Katishe, Satawa, Yeshe and the Yak boys. The boys began to organise a hot sludge-sort of meal for the yaks, made of grain paste. The animals would feel comfortable with the warm sludge for them. Yeshe got a meal organised for the mastiffs. The animals would have to eat inside the stone hut, for it would be dark and cold outside. Katishe began to get the breakfast organised. A large bowl of soup with yak fat

and butter started boiling, with appetising flavors. Sangye had warned Katishe against making any sound with the utensils or adding any flavored leafs or herbs. He did not want the smell to be noticed outside the stone hut. Not until they knew the area, anyway, and knew for sure that there would be no danger outside.

By 9 am, the entire group had got ready. Sangye asked the yak boys to take their animals outside and have them walk around. He had decided that the yaks and the yak boys would stay back at the stone hut. They would not proceed with the group until they had known the trail for some distance and would know for certain that it was safe ahead. They would not be able to run or move swiftly, if they had to, if they had the yaks and equipment with them. The area could be explored for the next 2-3 days, by keeping the stone hut as a base camp. The yaks could be allowed to graze near the stone hut, and would be returned inside at night. The yak boys would stay back.

Sangye split up the rest of the group. He decided that he would proceed ahead with Yeshe, on foot, and with the mastiffs. They would walk up the trail that climbed up sharply. Katishe and Satawa would watch the trail as Sangye and Yeshe walked. They would be able to notice if there was any movement on the rock walls or from within the forest areas, behind Sangye and Yeshe. Katishe and Satawa would follow Sangye and Yeshe, allowing for an hours distance between them and would repeat the same watchful procedure. This cautious approach would allow them to keep a watch on the trail behind them.

Katishe and Satawa agreed with the plan. They knew of the wisdom of the old nomad from Qinhai and knew that he had survived many a dangerous trail. Both of them, Katishe and Satawa, themselves, were veterans, and yet they knew it was sensible to be cautious in these regions. They did not know the area ahead of them, and it would be a slow exploration, to allow for a proper approach to the trail.

Yeshe had removed the stones at the doorway. The yaks were moved out into the valley and allowed to graze. The mastiffs went out, happy to be allowed to run about. Yeshe and the two yak boys went outside and moved around, watching, carefully. Sangye, Katishe and Satawa came out of the stone hut, and sat quietly. The fog had not lifted, and it was light enough to watch the trail for some distance. The old men sat, watching the trail. Nothing seemed to move. Even the birds were silent. The fog was quite cold, and the yaks were shivering. The yak boys walked around, picking up the yak dung and taking them back into the stone hut. They would decide about drying the dung if it was safe to do so. The mastiffs hid their morning sign well. They had been trained to do so, by Sangye, who knew the danger of leaving an open sign, a welcome to predators.

By 10 am, the fog had lifted completely, and they could see the path to the upper trail. It seemed like a natural gateway to an unknown valley. The path climbed up steadily and disappeared into the horizon. They were at a lower point from the place where the path went into the valley that they could not see. Sangye and Yeshe picked up their bags and began to walk ahead. The mastiffs kept watching them, to see if they would return, and began to

follow them. Katishe and Satawa kept watching the forests and the rock walls nearby.

The yak boys moved the yaks closer to the doorway to the stone hut. They could go inside quickly if required. Katishe asked the yak boys to prepare a door for the stone hut that could be propped up during the daytime. It had to be heavy, he told them. The boys began to search for and pick up heavy logs and pulled them to the doorway. The lower logs were placed across the doorway, high enough for the yaks to manage to walk above them. The logs were supported by stones piled up against them, on either side, inside and outside.

Other logs were kept inside with stones ready to be piled up against them, from the inside. The boys kept brush and branches near the doorway on the outside that could be pulled from within to create a cover across the doorway. Katishe watched the preparation and the valley alternatively. Satawa did not look away from the trail and kept watching Sangye and Yeshe. There did not seem to be any disturbance in the valley. Sangye had told them about old man Dawa going out on his own in the night. They knew him from many years and knew that the old man was probably safe out there. He may be up in the rocky walls, or on the trail, or in a cave that he may have discovered, and may be watching them from somewhere. Satawa looked all around the valley and waved. Dawa may see him and he would probably wave back.

Sangye spoke to Yeshe, “This may just be the entrance to the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’ as we knew about it, or heard about it. Many people have searched for it. The trail is certainly moving in the correct direction from the

Kang Renpoche valleys. We are moving north and northwestwards. We seem to be moving more to the north than northwest, and we have not left the group of mountains of the *Kang Renpoche*. It is said that there is a sleeping lion under this ground that rests on an enormous bed of water that cannot be seen.”

Yeshe kept watching the trail and the forests on either side. He was excited. The forests seemed to be changing as the trail kept climbing. They looked behind them, and waved at Katishe and Satawa. They could see them at that great distance. The trail had climbed sharply, and very soon, it would go through the opening in the valley wall. They would not be able to see the stone hut behind them.

“How can it be the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’, out here, in the Himalayas?” he asked, “for there are no lions here, and of all the stories that I have heard, there were no lions in these regions. Could it be a mythical story after all?” Sangye nodded, as if in agreement, and replied, “Yes. It could be a story, for there are many stories in this region. Some stories that I have heard say that the water comes out from the mouth of a lion, and some stories say that the lion is resting on a bed of water. So, we do not know. But, for sure, nobody in recent times, have actually seen the lion or the lion’s mouth or the bed of water.”

Yeshe asked, “But, isn’t there a Lion River from this region? Could the river be named from the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’ and could it have originated from this region? There were some groups at the Dirapuk monastery, a few years ago, who kept talking about such a river. They

had given up their search due to the severe unseasonal winter-like months at that time.”

Sangye nodded, remembering the group. They had only been in search of information. They had not seemed to be fit enough to travel inside the higher mountains. Yes. This path certainly looked like it was moving towards the place with the story of the ‘Kingdom of the Lion’. He looked back at the stone hut, and saw that Katishe and Satawa had begun to walk on the trail, following them. He knew of the Seng Tsanplo River from its northward flow, beyond the *Kang Renpoche* valley. The Seng Tsanplo River was also called the ‘Lion River’.



Book 2: Chapter 8: Part 5: Old man Dawa tracks the white lone male wild yak.

He had been walking for more than four hours, steadily, and climbing, through the forests that he had seen from the stone hut. Old man Dawa was surprised at the ease with which he had been walking through the forest. This was certainly an old ancient path, made smooth by years of passage. He had not even stumbled on any pebble or stone. The path had not been blocked by any bushy tree or bamboo or foliage. He had not been able to see within the forest canopy during the dawn hours. But, the expert trailsman that he was, he knew that there were no animals out here.

By 11 am, he had reached the upper limits of the forest line and he could see through the canopy and could look out at the boxed in valley. From up here, he could see the stone hut, the river of boulders that they had walked through, and could see the trail that climbed up, northwards. Old man Dawa sat quietly, watching the valley. He saw the yaks and the yak boys near the stone hut. He could see Sangye and Yeshe walk up on the northwards trail, with the two mastiffs following them. He saw Katishe and Satawa walk at an hours' distance behind Sangye and Yeshe.

He was startled at the clear vision that he had of the valley from the spot that he sat upon. If he could see so clearly, other animals and humans, hidden in this valley could also see them. Any animal or person sitting here, yesterday, could have seen the arrival of the Beyul exploration team. They would have been warned. The alert wild yaks, if they were indeed here, would have moved out of this valley. He had not seen any trail or

sign of any animal during his walk through the forest. Old man Dawa got up from his spot and continued to walk westwards.

The opening came up on the trail suddenly. The corners of the boxed in valley at the western corner were more of a fold that hid the opening. The valley turned inside a narrow fold that took him through the forest canopy. It became dark for some distance, and if he would not have understood the feel and recognised the touch of the trail on his feet, he would not have been able to locate the opening. He could feel the smooth trail in the dark canopy, and he continued to walk through the gap.

By noon, the dark opening had led old man Dawa to a broader forest, and with more sunlight streaming inside the canopy. He turned on the trail that he had come through and could not see the boxed-in valley that he had traveled from. The opening to the valley from this path seemed to be equally hidden in. He picked up some signs on the rock walls, the ridges and markings on the slopes to identify the opening through which the path had come. It was difficult, and it would have been impossible for a novice trekker or even an expert mountaineer. Old man Dawa was sharper than either, and he knew enough to pick out and identify faint stone ridges that would help him return to this place.

Having marked the location, he turned back to the trail, and continued to walk inside this hidden valley. The path seemed to be clearing up, and he was suddenly near the edge of the forest. He could see an open plateau outside. It seemed to be more like a high altitude pasture land. There was plenty of grass here, and it seemed quite tall, but not tall enough to hide a yak, he thought. Old man

Dawa was cautious. He did not step out of the forest. He stood against some bamboo and a very large tree.

Making an opening into the bamboo clump, he went inside and made some space for himself. He hid his haversack and stout stick inside the clump and covered them with bamboo leaves. He sat quietly, on his haversack, not making any movement. There was no sign of any animal in the grassland. Slowly, he took out his lunch packet, and ate it quietly. He had a bottle of water with him, and he drank from it.

He knew this game quite well. This was the beginning of the game of patience. He knew that there was something out there in this grassland plateau, hidden inside this closed valley. He would wait and would wait and wait. He had played out the waiting game at many a hunt. He knew that there would always be animals in any valley, and if they could not be seen, it would only mean that they were very alert. Old man Dawa certainly did not want to walk into an angry wild yak out here.

He must have sat inside the bamboo clump for more than an hour. Suddenly, his right palm began to itch furiously. He kept scratching it silently, and watched the plains, extremely alert. There was something out there, he knew. Where was it? From his place inside the bamboo clump, old man Dawa could see the entire grassland plateau. The mountain walls were all around the grassland. There was a forest line around the plateau. That could be a problem, Dawa thought, for the forest could hide any other path, if there was, and animals could be moving through the valley to other valleys nearby.

The strangest aspect of the valley was that he could not see any animal. There should have been Chiru and mountain goats here. The lush grassland should have been a temptation. What was he sensing? If there were no animals here, why was his right palm itching so badly, wondered Dawa. There was something out here. It was bright sunlight on the grassland and he could see the entire plateau. Maybe it was not something on the grassland, thought Dawa. Maybe he would have to examine the forest that went around the plateau.

Quietly, without any movement, Dawa kept searching the forest line around the grassland. There was no movement. He wondered if he should risk it and walk into the grassland. He decided against it. That trail of the lone wild yak had been very recent in the night. For, it had not been covered with dew or water. If it would have been more than a day, the track would have been covered with water from the night mist or morning dew. It had been extremely clear and sharp.

There! Suddenly, old man Dawa saw the movement. It was the strangest of all movements. Not certainly what he had been searching for. It was like a white blanket inside the forest beyond the grassland facing him. A white blanket like form had moved inside the forest area in front of him. He kept watching the spot. He could not see it any longer. He was happy, however, for he knew what he had to search for. He had been searching for large black forms, shapes of Chiru, and shapes of mountain goats. He started looking deep inside the forest ahead, beyond the grassland, for a white shape.

What was it? Some sacred spirits of the valley? Could spirits be seen in the daytime? He had never heard of

such a being. To the best of his knowledge and memory, of all the stories that he had heard of these regions, the spirits and demons usually came out at night. Perhaps, this was where they came to rest, inside these secluded valleys, away from all disturbances. He kept watching the forest keenly. There it was, again, a white blanket like form, floating inside the forest. It kept moving, inside the canopy, and came to rest near a group of thin trees.

Old man Dawa kept staring at the white blanket-like shape. It did not move. It seemed to be waiting, watching the grassland. As he kept staring at the white shape, Dawa began to figure it out. The left edge of the blanket seemed to taper downwards and there was a definite shape to it. Suddenly, a rope-like white cord whisked out from below and moved about. That was definitely a tail, a white tail, Dawa realised, excitedly. That white blanket was not a blanket, or a spirit, or a demon, he told himself, happily. It was a white animal, very large, and huge.

Dawa was excited. Now that he knew how to figure it out, he began to make out the rest of the shape. The right edge of the white 'blanket', naturally led to its head, and as he kept watching for the head to take shape, Dawa trembled. He shivered, actually. For, as he kept watching, the animal began to become clearer. It was a white animal. Very huge. The head began to take shape, and Dawa marveled at it. It was an extremely large head, and the horns were enormous. It was, indeed, a huge male yak. It was definitely not a black yak. This one was an enormous, larger than most yaks he had known, and perhaps, just perhaps, larger than the herd of large wild yaks that he had seen during the rainstorm, with Brother

Tameng, near the Choku monastery. This animal, hiding out there, in the forest beyond the grassland, was an enormous white male yak, alone, waiting and watching and waiting. Excited, and yet, calm, Dawa told himself, he could also wait.



